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CZECHOSLOVAK AIRBORNE UNITS

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Date of events : 1947 - 1948.

#### I. TRAINING OF OFFICERS - INSTRUCTORS.

Recruiting for this course was published in VECEI VESTNIK in June 1947. Conditions : Officers of all branches up to the rank of Staff Captains up to 35 years of age. Applications were filed through Battalion commanders at the Ministry of National Defense, completed with comments by the commanding officer and a medical certificate, from the unit's medical officer. The accepted applicants were summoned to Praha for examinations, which consisted of medical and psychotechnical tests. The latter were undergone at Hradcany - medical examinations in Dejvice, Klecandova ulice ( Army Depot ).

The psychotechnical test consisted of an intelligence test, where the tests were the same as those for recruits of the Military Academy and of an examination in skill and nerves. Projected pictures of night fighters and transparent colored pictures were used for examination of eye sharpness and observation talent. The psychotechnical examinations were made in groups of ten men. On the average, six out of the ten officers were selected for the course. One or two failed at the examination and three or four left voluntarily when they were informed that this was not only a training but a transfer to the Airborne units.

The instructor's course took place at the beginning of September 1947 and lasted for two months and a half for officers who had returned to their original units. Those who remained definitely with the Airborne units had to undergo a longer training with parachutes and jumps which followed the basic training. The training took place at ZAKUPY and RALSKO. Altogether there were 40 persons and about 20 of them had finished their training period. 12 - 15 of them remained there as instructors at RALSKO and ZAKUPY ( airfield called KUTER ). The remaining 5 stayed at ZAKUPY. During the training period about 10 persons were released because of injuries and illness and later returned to their original units.

The commander of this course was [Lt. Col. PALSOFF] and the instructor was [Capt. CERNOTA]. Differences in rank and file were not considered during the training period. The nature of the training was the same as in later groups of NCO's and ranks, with regard to the trainee's ability to instruct by themselves what they have learned.

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Commander of all the Airborne units at that time was Col. Karel PALECEK, who today is most probably a General.

III. Training of ranks during their normal military service :

Recruiting of privates and NCO's during their normal military service was announced in Battalion orders of all units and branches of the services.

Condition for admission :

- School for NCO's with excellent record;
- Consent and permission of the company commander;
- Medical certificate from the medical doctor of the unit;

The applications were filed through normal channels and had to contain the reason why the applicants would like to join the Airborne unit. ( A small number of applicants was involved due to the unknown length of training and soldiers were afraid that the training might prolong the time of their military training. The psychotechnical examinations lasted for 5 days and took place in August.

The course started on the 1st October 1947 at ZAKUPY, district CIESKA LIPA, attended by 300 trainees. After three days they were divided into two groups of 150 each - one of them remained at ZAKUPY and the other was sent to STRAZ POD BALSKEM.

Commanders :

- Airborne units C.O. : (General) Karel PALECEK
- C.O. at ZAKUPY : (Major) Rudolf HYZEK - comment : graduate of Staff College; due to Palecek's request attached to the Airborne units and became chief of staff. The C.O. of the Airborne units at ZAKUPY at that time was (Major) TALASEK, member of the former Cx. Western Bde, later in Russia).
- C.O. at BALSKE : (Major) Frantisek VEZALA
- C.O. at BALSKE after February 1948 : (Staff Capt.) Josef CERNOTA

STRAZ POD BALSKEM :

Small wooden houses - 13 m long ( German military folding houses ). 10 men were allocated to one room at the beginning - during the training period this number was reduced to 7.

Training :

- 0500 - reveille
- 0500 - 0530 ... 30 min. m. riding exercise
- 0530 - 0600 ... washing and breakfast
- 0600 - 0700 ... Morse
- 0700 - 0800 ... training on hurdle paths
- 0800 - 0900 ... classroom ( weapons and theory )
- 0900 - 1000 ... physical training and jiu-jitsu outdoors

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1100 - 1300 ... noon interval and lunch  
 1300 - 1700 ... terrain running, practical flight training  
 2200 taps

The main importance during the training was given to partyzan fighting; silent killing in double sentry, armed with a knife and Chinese rope. Sabotage - a party of six : two killers, two with submachine guns, one sweeper, four skirmishers and one commander.

Our comment :

Training at STRAZ POD RALSKEM was divided into two parts : training of normal Airborne units and the non-normalized ones which will have to co-operate closely in a future war with the 2nd and 5th Departments of the General Staff. During a war these should be special units of a strength up to one company with special tasks : Partyzan coy, sabotage coy, intercommunication coy, destruction coy, propaganda coy, etc.etc.

Hurdless p.ex. jumps from 5 m heights

Synthetical apparatuses

Morne was apparently of smaller importance; trainees could receive 40 - 60 cm on an average.

Beginning of 1st April, trainees were divided into groups of 20 men each, namely according to their efficiency. The best were in the first group; there were four groups altogether. During September - April, 90 men were expelled for various reasons, and 10 men admitted from the class 25, as well as 10 instructors, who were also trained in parachute jumps. The expelled ones did not return to their units but remained as an auxiliary unit ( kitchen, construction of hurdles etc.)

Reasons for rejections : wounds ( about 50 men ), fractures of arms, legs or collar bones; non-ability ( about 25 men ); fear ( about 15 men ) - everyone could ask to be released if he was frightened during the training.

Between September and April about 10 test flights were made. During the last ones some provisions were taken out so that the trainees could get used to the view out of a plane. Besides the training jumps there was also the normal routine. The first jumps were undertaken on June 10, 1948. Staff Sgt.s and instructors jumped from 350 m, men from 450 m. It was forbidden to jump when wind velocity was higher than 20 m/sec.

The parachutes used had a static line, 6 m long. A new type of parachute was used, constructed by a Czech Lt. ( name unknown ) - a combination of western and Russian type.

comment:

Still in 1946 - 7 there were considerable stocks of German static parachutes for personal and material ( the latter ones were also of Italian type ), but were not used because of unreliability as they were of old material. Maj. G. LOCHNAR suggested a static parachute which was in fact a copy of the British statical parachute, and the firm BAK in Praha-Halesovice was entrusted with its production.

During the winter of 1947, a former tailor of the operational group of the 2nd Dept., MAJERA, was reactivated, promoted to the rank of Lt. and entrusted by Col. PALACEK to start negotiations about parachute production with the BAK factory. The owner of this factory, Capt. ROPELAK, had personally complained that Lt. MAJERA had non-sensical suggestions for the bettering touches of prototype parachute, which had been finished already and jumps had to be made.

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